Religion
Berkeley, Calif.

Social Questions

BULLETIN

of the Methodist Federation for Social Service (unofficial), an organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

VOLUME 29 JUNE, 1939 NUMBER 6

Protestant Churches —and Democracy

Last month we considered the relation of the Roman Catholic Church to the democratic process. This month we turn our eyes toward the Protestant Churches, asking if they may be considered a guarantor of democratic rights, or whether they tend toward the anti-democratic front.

A WORD OF HISTORY

The Protestant Church broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in the interests of individual freedom. The new forces set to work by the humanism of the Renaissance and the expansion of trade could not be kept within an organization that placed limitations on social, religious and intellectual freedom. People must grow. They broke with the Church of Rome. This, however, did not guarantee a love of freedom as such. Intolerance was matched by intolerance. Yet within the new forces was the root principle of a vigorous new economic idea, the idea of individual enterprise. As early capitalism broke with feudalism, so did early Protestantism break with Catholicism. If they were not one in spirit, capitalism and Protestantism did have much in common, and soon realized it. Together with the impetus toward nationalism they worked for a new day.

An element of revolt within these new movements demanded privileges for the growing trader or middle class. As the restraints of feudalism and Catholicism were thrown over, a limited form of democracy was demanded—an extension of control by the middle class, which has habitually defended the rights of its own group and opposed tendencies toward autocracy on the one hand and on the other, too great control by the lower class.

Protestantism has shared a liberal tradition because it shared the interests of the expanding economic group. The question we must face is whether or not Protestantism and capitalism are so closely knit that the contracting of the economic group under the capitalist crisis will necessarily cause a lessening of interest in and support of the civil privileges granted under capitalism. If the Protestant Churches choose to stand with capitalism they will abandon the social and religious ideals of democracy for, as Laski has pointed out, capitalism and democracy are incompatible. But if the churches see the need for expanding beyond the limited democratic concepts of capitalist democracy they will be able to help usher in a day of greater democratic control over all phases of life—economic, social, racial, industrial and political.

IN AMERICA

To an uncommon degree Protestantism in America has shared the larger democratic interest natural in a frontier country where innovation was easy. The dominant concept in American Protestant thought has been the Kingdom of God, and a major part of this concept has been the religious, intellectual and civil liberty of the individual. Though the concept of human sinfulness prevented utopianism, there has been a belief in perfectability, which rested on improved social institutions.

There have been groups, and there still are groups in the United States and in the Protestant Churches who have been driven by selfish motives to limit freedom. These motives have varied from exploiting Negro labor in the South to exploiting foreign labor in the North; from protecting oppressive private property in industrial areas to limiting the rights of migratory workers in agricultural areas. The methods have varied as have the motives. In some places fear and falsehood have been stirred up, in others terrorism has been employed, while at other times a false concept of patriotism has been stimulated. When industrial labor conditions have become distressing, attempts have been made to divert attention from the real cause by setting up religious and racial group conflicts which have drained off the resentment against basic evils. Even on occasion twisted legal interpretations have been used to violate civil rights. All these are efforts to limit democratic rights, and all are participated in to some degree by the Protestant population.

FALSE AMERICANISM

Though Protestantism has been closely connected with the most vigorous expressions of democracy in history, it is also true that groups within Protestantism have in the past and are still giving support to activities that cannot be in the interests of democracy. The Know-Nothing Movement of seventy-five years ago with its anti-foreign, anti-Catholic emphasis assumed that Protestantism was the religious expression of Americanism, and worked to deny religious liberty to others. The workers who suffered from competition of foreigners did not realize that it was the exploiting force and not the imported labor which was their enemy. Naively,

they fell into a conflict that prevented labor from uniting to protect its own interests. Religion played a large part in this conflict. Fifty years ago the American Protective Association followed a similar program, as did the Ku Klux Klan fifteen years ago. Though these organizations worked under the guise of Americanism they depended on terrorism, violated democratic rights, and thrived on intolerance, superstition and falsehood. They represented crude ethical judgment with basically un-Christian action.

These organizations have lineal descendents in our day, whose programs and purpose are merely streamlined versions of old hates, old fears and intolerance. True to form they distort Christian teaching and prey upon ignorance and easily perverted emotions. As religious ideas are distorted so are religious symbols, with even the Cross caricatured by the Nazi Swastika and the fiery insults of the Ku Klux Klan. The Christian Front, so-called, made up of Coughlinites, Protestant as well as Catholic, is characterized by anti-Semitism, crack-pot economics and the anti-democratic program of its leader. Similar anti-Semitic, and sometimes anti-Catholic activity is a part of the program of the Silver Shirts, the Knights of the White Camellia and some thirty or more organizations that make an appeal to Protestants and do so in the name of Christian action, when in truth the organizations represent extreme examples of intolerance, unbrotherliness and hatred, the exact opposites of fundamental Christian teaching.

WINROD AND OTHERS

Gerald B. Winrod, the self-styled "Prophetic Voice Crying in the Wilderness," makes his appeal to the fundamentalist group in the Protestant Church with a mixture of wild prophesy, astrology, Biblical interpretation and pseudo-Republicanism.

The president of the Constitutional Government League, Seattle, Wash., E. H. Rettig, writes, "The connection between the writer and Dr. Winrod is the Holy Spirit that binds our hearts in Christian love. It was the Jews who rejected and crucified my Saviour. They said let his blood be upon us and our children. The whole New Testament scripture is a testimony against the Jew after the flesh."

Rev. W. B. Riley of First Baptist Church in Minneapolis writes, "Study of the Scriptures showed me that this is not the age for the Jews' redemption. . . . I read the *Protocols* (and if you have not read them you ought to do it). . . . I am firmly convinced that they are not a counterfeit or a plagiarism. The Russian who discovered them and brought them to light was a good and godly man, in my judgment, and a real patriot; and he realized the danger to his country, which, as you probably know, is now suffering under an overwhelming majority of Jewish rulers and butchers! . . . I do not believe that Winrod has the slightest connection with Hitler. I find many men who have been over to Germany—in fact, most of those that I have talked with—complimentary to German conditions at the present time. . . . I will send you a copy of the *Protocols* if you have not read them."

The head of the Florida Bible Institute in a statement on Winrod says, "Knowing him as I do, having heard him preach as I have and knowing his prayer life . . . I, personally, know of no man in America who is more courageous in his stand for the Bible, the defense of the Church, for the promotion of the Gospel and for the salvation of souls than Dr. Winrod. It has been a pleasure to have Dr. Winrod with us in many conferences which have been attended by thousands of people who listened to his message with great interest and profit."

Winrod's paper, the *Defender,* is a rabid anti-Semitic paper, anti-Russian, anti-liberal, anti-New-Deal and anti-democratic. His appeal is to the socially and economically illiterate who are most fertile soil for fascism.

The same characteristics appear in the eighty-odd American fascist weeklies mentioned by *Propaganda Analysis* and most of them are of Protestant origin, using the label "Christian." Gerald Smith, now teamed up with Coughlin in Detroit, matches the priest's *"Christian America"* with *"For God and Country."* Senator Reynolds, head of the vindicators that Dies had to drop, calls on all Protestants to unite in defense of "our democracy and our Christianity."

There are also tendencies among the more intellectually respectable which hold grave dangers for democracy. The Buchmanites, or Oxford Groupers, face the social crisis with a social welfare pietism, and their leader passes on the typical Nazi propaganda saying, "Thank God for Hitler. He has saved the western world from Bolshevism." This group with its appeal to the "upper crust" puts religious evasion in the place of prophetic vision and intelligent analysis of the modern scene.

GERMAN METHODISTS

Then there are German Methodists who feel that Hitler has saved Germany from a sense of inferiority, from Bolshevism and from racial disaster. Bishop F. H. Otto Melle of Germany, head of the Methodist Church there, recently said, "The German government has not yet interfered with the activities of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Germany. No explicit restrictions are placed on Methodist preachers. The only restrictions are those which we place on ourselves. The government does not want politics preached in the pulpit, but we are preaching the gospel. No Methodist preachers have been denied access to their pulpits by the government. Preaching in Germany is confined to Biblical subjects with no references to current politics, resulting in a healthy spiritual condition for the Church."

One is forced to ask after reading this naive defense of Hitler what Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah and Jesus would think of such a "healthy spiritual condition." The fact that the German Church with a tradition of aloofness from social and political life has reaped such a reward should be all the more reason why Protestants elsewhere must jealously guard the privileges of making ethical judgments on social and political matters.

FREEDOM AND EVASION

The Protestant Church with its democratic organization and liberal tradition is not restrained by the innate conservatism one finds in the Roman Catholic Church. It is freer from restraint from above and more able to respond to needs and movements from the masses of people. But this freedom also permits a lack of discipline

that can make evasion a practice. With too many Protestant clergymen a protective practice of not wanting to know about current problems, and of keeping the peace at any price has developed. With others, well intentioned social passion is misdirected into anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic and anti-progressive movements. Any activity directed against a racial or religious minority has the earmarks of fascism, for the act of turning against any minority group merely as an escape from truth is accepting fascist procedure. Such misdirected social passion places Protestantism in the rôle of an anti-democratic aggressor against the rights and needs of the people.

The Republican Party, which is close to the heart of many Protestants, seems to have been singled out for cooperation by these anti-democratic elements. In Michigan the Black Legion was linked with the Republican machine, in Kansas Winrod ran in the Republican primaries, and in Minnesota the Silver Shirts worked for the Republican candidate for governor, Harold Stassen. Such manifestations are not isolated, but are part of a larger movement of reaction to take over a major party for increased anti-democratic activity. The party of Wall Street, supplemented by the misled masses who are inflamed by anti-racial, anti-religious and patriotic propaganda, would be a formidable opponent to a progressive solution of our social problems.

PROGRESSIVE ELEMENTS

Yet there has been for almost fifty years a movement within the Church to educate for social change. The Methodist Federation for Social Service, The Church League for Industrial Democracy, The United Christian Council for Democracy and the Federal Council of Churches, to speak of but a few of the older groups, have been at work educating and directing effective social action.

While it is impossible to measure such effort it is certainly true that the Church is far more conscious of social problems and of the place of social ethics than it was two generations ago. Official conference and convention reports show a definite type of statement on social issues. In a questionnaire which 5,500 Methodist ministers answered, only 171 found capitalism compatible with the ideals and methods of Jesus and the prophets. While attitudes may have changed since the question was asked, there is considerable evidence that the present system has been brought into question by clergymen.

THE TASK BEFORE US

Having so expressed their idea, what is to be done? Attempts are being made to intrench capitalism. Fascism is capitalism in its most corrupted stage. Are we going to admit that the civil rights granted under capitalism were mere luxuries to be sloughed off whenever the controlling forces found them no longer desirable? Or are we going to start now to show that we do not intend to permit any abridging of the freedom of religion or the democratic process of change?

Protestantism has grown along with capitalism, but it is not necessarily a part of it. Though the task of lifting itself beyond the limitations of capitalism is hardly more promising than lifting one's self by one's boot straps, the task must be done to preserve the religious and ethical values involved. There is, however, the advantage that we can take off the leaded boots of a capitalist economy and approach the Kingdom of God freed of that which is rooted in organized selfishness and national greed. But the process is not an easy one. It will call for a rededication of social concern and ethical sensitiveness.

The groupings and movements within Protestantism are too diverse to permit exact analysis. But lines have been drawn and are being sharpened. Groups are finding their sympathy with the dying order or against it. The protection of the democratic process of change alone can guarantee a civilized readjustment to the demands of a new day. Are we willing to protect the best of western civilization by protecting our democratic rights? Or are we going to submit to an increasing threat to the rights of others and ourselves? Your answer and your action will go far in determining whether the Protestant Church will be listed as a democratic or anti-democratic force.

—REV. EDGAR JACKSON.

We are indebted to Rev. L. M. Birkhead of the Friends of Democracy for the loan of source material.

Test Poll

Concerning our policy in relation to the international situation (cf. instructions in April BULLETIN):

Number of Members Voting		164
YES—on all 4 counts		93
NO—on all 4 counts		10
MIXED		61
	Yes	*No*
1. Boycott	114	45
2. Embargo	146	17
3. Sale to Victims of Aggressor Nations	110	51
4. Concerted Action	120	39

The National Meeting instructed me to add a summary of my interpretation:

The smallness of the vote, with six weeks allowed for it, indicates the same general indecision that exists in Washington. The trends correspond roughly to those shown by Gallup Polls. Clearly there is no mandate to change. Also it is clear that our major emphasis is to be on the embargo.

Some who are opposed to our policy naturally desired alternatives to vote on. The expense involved for printing and mailing made this impossible. Hence it was decided to vote on the straight question of continuance or discontinuance of policy, and ask people to write in their desired alternatives for discussion at the meeting. The few who did this support the policy of the present Neutrality Act; an economic conference instead of economic non-cooperation; a program for positive democracy at home. The two latter seem to us to be supplementary rather than alternative, and will receive more emphasis.

Several of those who cannot accept our present policy wish that we could leave foreign affairs alone and go back to our original task of Christianizing the economic order. But the two are now inseparable. The international situation imposes a war economy in place of social planning for social ends, and prevents the democratic approach to the latter objective.

Several letters questioned whether we weren't helping British and French imperialism, despite our explanation that the only concerted action possible now is between popular democratic forces, and that this would help remove the imperialist cliques in London and Paris from power.

The question was raised about our policy being economic war. But economic non-cooperation with governmental invasion of other countries is very different from blockade to subdue a nation.

Another point raised is that the situation now is the same as in 1917. But there is a factual difference between the feudalistic imperialism of the Kaiser and the new imperialism of Hitler. The former did not seek to stamp out democracy, either in Germany or conquered countries—Hitler does. The difference between imperialistic democracies and fascist imperialisms, is that the former still have a chance to correct their evils by the democratic method and the latter do not. Another difference between now and 1917 is that then the economic pressure which pushed us into the conflict, came from sales to our allies—now it comes from sales to our prospective enemies.

The basic difference between the supporters and opponents of our policy is over the question of sales to the victims of the invader. All are agreed on the necessity of stopping sales to the invading aggressor. If this part of the question could be separated, united action would be possible. The refusal to separate roots is a basic difference in moral judgment. One side regards even defense against invasion as un-Christian, and hence cannot consent to selling means of defense to other countries invaded. Consistency requires opposition to any provision for defense of this country.

It is to be hoped that those who take this position will not feel compelled to leave our ranks. It is their duty to witness to an undying ideal. If there could be a division of labor, and they could carry on this function while the rest of us deal with present wrongs, both aspects of our Gospel would be represented and we could present a united front to the enemies of peace and democracy.

The Meeting thereupon voted that members disagreeing with the foreign policy of the Federation are urged to remain members and continue to express their beliefs and attitudes on these issues.

—H. F. W.

Act Now

Our National Meeting took the following action concerning pending legislation at Washington and urges you to follow it up by letters and resolutions to the Congressmen and Senators named.

Wagner Act. We oppose all amendments; any needed improvements can be secured by administrative changes now being considered. (Senators Robert F. Wagner and Elbert D. Thomas.)

W.P.A. We protest recent cuts and lay-offs. We demand: restoring appropriations to amount originally requested by the President for this year; continuance of W.P.A., including Arts projects. We protest present inquiry into political affiliations of W.P.A. workers. (Congressman Edward T. Taylor.)

Civil Liberties. We endorse additional $100,000.00 to continue work of the LaFollette Committee. We request Rules Committee of House not to report out Smith Omnibus Bill, HR-5138, containing practically all possible repression of aliens and reviving Alien Sedition Act of 1789. (Lewis B. Schwellenbach.) We request the Senate not to approve the Dempsey Bill, HR-4860, which would deport all aliens advocating "any change in the American form of government." (Hon. Adolph J. Sabath.) Also the Hobbs Bill, HR-5643, which provides permanent places of detention for aliens ordered deported for whom passports cannot be obtained from foreign governments. (Senator Henry F. Ashurst.)

Lynching. We demand the passage of the Anti-Lynching Bill. (Hon. Joseph A. Gavagan.)

Refugees. We endorse the Wagner-Rogers Resolution, SJR-64 and HJR-168, calling for admission of 10,000 refugee children under 14 from Germany, Jews and Christians, when responsible sponsors are provided. (Senator Robert F. Wagner and Hon. Edith M. Rogers.)

Agricultural Workers. We request the extension of Federal labor and social legislation to all agricultural workers. (Senator Elbert D. Thomas.)

Youth. We reaffirm our support of the American Youth Act and urge increased appropriations and facilities to provide adequate employment opportunities for youth. (Senator Ernest Lundeen.)

(Other actions taken by the National Meeting, not so urgent, will be reported in the September BULLETIN.)

IMPORTANT

Ex-Governor Sweet of Colorado, a Congregationalist and one of our long-time supporters, is writing a personal letter to laymen asking for contributions toward the $1,000 deficit we must raise by September 30th. Surely you can think of one or more socially-minded men or women who ought to get this letter and the printed story of Charlie Webber's field work which goes with it. *Please send us their names and addresses by return mail.*

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issued monthly, except July and August. The general policies of this publication are determined by the Executive Committee of the Methodist Federation for Social Service, subject to approval by the National Committee of the Federation. The selection of topics and material is committed to the Secretaries, who are responsible to the Federation and to the public for its accuracy.

Membership $1.00 per year
Special rate to student groups.

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The METHODIST FEDERATION *for* SOCIAL SERVICE

150 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Entered as second-class matter January 21, 1919, at the Postoffice at New York, N. Y., under Act of August 24, 1912.

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